

¡viva venezuela!

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Remembering Hugo Chávez 1954-2013

Also inside: ■ When Hugo Chávez came to London
■ The Revolution Continues

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**Venezuela
Solidarity
Campaign**



Chavismo remains popular due to social transformation of Venezuela



Venezuelans remember Hugo Chávez

“Chavista candidates won 54% of the vote – and the overwhelming majority of mayors and councillors – with the right-wing coalition lagging behind by 12% and over one million votes”

One year on from the death of Hugo Chávez, Venezuela’s revolution continues – despite the offensive launched to overturn it over the past year.

Claims pushed by right wing circles - and repeated by their champions in sections of the media - that Chavismo was over were demolished by local election results in December. Chavista candidates won 54% of the vote – and the overwhelming majority of mayors and councillors – with the right-wing coalition lagging behind by 12% and over one million votes.

President Maduro’s narrow victory at the presidential elections of April 2013 had seen opponents predicting that the end was near. Their exuberance was clear: “The result demonstrates that, without Chávez at the helm, Chavismo, a noxious cocktail of populism, incompetence and repression, is a far less potent force. That is the good news” cheered *The Economist* (20/4/2013).

Seeking to take advantage of that new situation, economic sabotage - exacerbating Venezuela’s current economic problems - and violent assaults on Chavista supporters, killing 11 innocent people, formed part of the attempts of the Venezuelan right and their international allies to overturn the country’s social transformation. Yet they failed. President Nicolas Maduro’s political leadership was decisive in this. His strong measures to enforce the law and end outrageous profiteering in Venezuela (with companies charging over 10

times the set prices for goods) help to explain the strong electoral victory. A new law has set maximum profit levels, benefiting the majority’s living standards.

The election results also underlined how President Maduro is seen as the candidate who will truly continue the legacy of Hugo Chávez, whose government’s rescue of Venezuela from neo-liberal catastrophe is deeply appreciated by the overwhelming majority of Venezuelans. President Maduro explained this transformation in his recent State of the Nation speech, saying “Of the \$883bn dollars that have come into the country from oil sales, \$551.5bn have been invested in housing, food, culture, education, health care and the social life of the people.”

The progressive consequences of this are there for all to see. Poverty has been halved and extreme poverty reduced by two-thirds. By the end of 2013 unemployment stood at 7% (compared to levels approaching 30% in the much wealthier countries of Spain and Greece). Half a million affordable houses have been built in just two years. Thanks to subsidised supermarkets, 96% of Venezuelans now consume three meals a day. So, whatever ongoing problems remain in Venezuela, the positive transformation of the living standards of the majority is undeniable.

The unavoidable political conclusion of recent months, notwithstanding systematic negative media coverage, is that Chavismo remains a formidably attractive option for the immense majority of Venezuelans. The chief reason is the continuation of President Chávez’s legacy: policies that defend Venezuela’s long excluded majority, and, unlike in many countries, do not punish the poorest.

Viva Chávez! Viva Venezuela!

This magazine is published by the Venezuela Solidarity Campaign

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Venezuela Solidarity Campaign



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Scottish Children Perform With Venezuela's Renowned Youth Orchestra

Fifty-two children from Scotland's Raploch Big Noise orchestra travelled to Caracas in January to practise and perform directly alongside children from Venezuela's *El Sistema* youth orchestra system.

During their stay, they played a concert with their Venezuelan counterparts, received a special workshop with world-renowned famous director Gustavo Dudamel, and took part in exchange activities such as teaching their friends Scottish ceilidh dancing.

While in Caracas Nicolas Killeen, Sistema Scotland Director and CEO, said: "The Venezuelan welcome has been so warm and the children in the two orchestras have bonded wonderfully. Everyone is so excited to be, here in the home of *El Sistema* which has been such an inspiration to us."

Venezuela's *El Sistema* system now has 685 orchestras and brings over 400,000 children to the study of classical music, 75% of them from poor backgrounds. Its methodology is considered very beneficial to child development and combating social problems. The youth orchestra system has received great support and funding from the Hugo Chávez and Nicolas



Gustavo Dudamel conducts a workshop with Scottish & Venezuelan students. Photocredit: Sistema Scotland



The Combined Scots-Venezuela El Sistema orchestra playing in the National Centre for Social Action through Music in Caracas. Photocredit: Sistema Scotland

Maduro-led governments and captured the imaginations of musical education specialists around the globe, with *El Sistema* orchestras being established in 35 countries.

El Sistema Scotland was set up in 2008 in Raploch. Another orchestra has been set up in Glasgow and more are expected to be formed in the country.

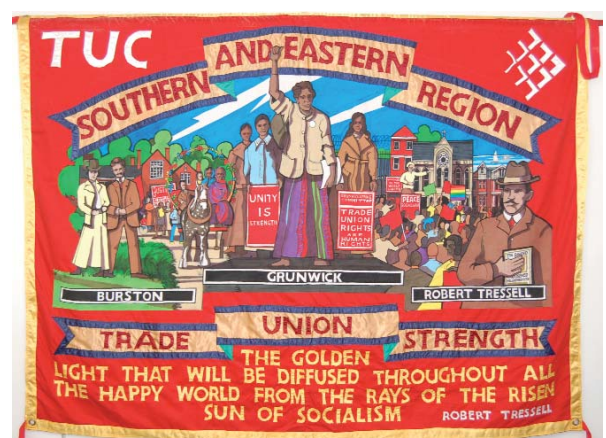
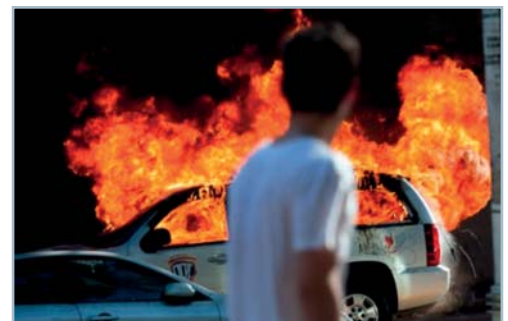
Stop Press! Extreme Right-Wing Violence in Venezuela Condemned

As part of a campaign launched by extreme right-wing opposition leaders in Venezuela, which they have called *La Salida* (The Ousting), violent groups launched a wave of street disturbances in Venezuela on 12 February.

Tragically this resulted in the death of at least four people and 23 people injured.

President Maduro called the wave of opposition violence an attempt at a coup, after leading opposition leaders backed *La Salida*, calling on people to take to the streets to force "the exit" of the government well before it finishes its constitutional mandate in 2019.

La Salida is being unleashed just as President Maduro has begun a productive dialogue with recently elected opposition mayors focused on bringing about stability in Venezuela, seeking to resolve differences through dialogue and negotiations. Clearly extreme right wing elements within the opposition, and their external funders, see these calls for collaboration as a threat to their illegal, undemocratic and unconstitutional objectives.



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Solidarity with the people of Venezuela
building on the gains achieved under the
late President Hugo Chavez

The Revolution Continues

In January President Nicolas Maduro delivered his first State of the Nation speech since being elected.

Maduro launches the popular 'Government of the street' initiative

Announcing a number of initiatives aimed to tackle the “economic war” being conducted by elements of the right-wing opposition against the country’s elected government, he warned of harsher penalties for “sabotage and speculation”. Issuing a defiant message to his opponents, President Maduro said: “For those that underestimate me from the left and the extreme right, I say that I’m a socialist and I know what I’m doing.”



Countering ‘sabotage and speculation’

A focus of Maduro’s address was that he intends to deepen measures and reforms to counter the ongoing “economic war,” pledging to counter “both abuse and outrages” of the economy, with tougher penalties for “sabotage and speculation”.

Shockingly, he revealed that 99% of businesses inspected by authorities last year were inappropriately pricing goods, with “no economic explanation”. To counter this, Maduro announced a new law that will cap businesses’ profit margins at 30%.

“While the government makes a big effort to guarantee the quality of some services and the availability of products, the mafias speculate with other products and even medicines,” he argued. Referring to shortages of goods such as milk, cooking oil and toilet paper, he added: “With the economic war they have shown a cruelty that is comparable only to the acts of 2002.” He continued:

**In Solidarity with
Venezuela – continuing to
show there is an alternative!**



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“How can you describe someone who hides formula milk for babies [from supermarket shelves]? We cannot create a new euphemism for that...That person must be described as a criminal...they’re speculating with food and medicine.”

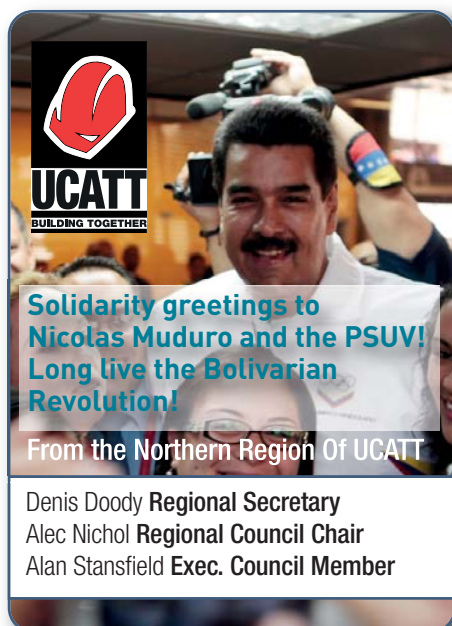
Investment Plan and Reflections on 2013

Elsewhere in his address President Maduro explained that the government’s new investment plan will focus on promoting investment in 11 key areas, with 25.5 billion bolivars to be invested in public works nationwide in the coming years. He also stated his government aims to bring more foreign investment to Venezuela, by providing some new incentives to investors.

Maduro also looked back on the last year, summarising that “2013 was a year of love, loyalty and victory over pain and difficulties. We turned grief into strength and life in joy.”

Referring to the April and December elections, and how the opposition refused to accept the will of the people following his own victory April’s election, the President stated that “democracy is only meaningful if it meets the needs of the people and not the accumulation of wealth.”

Pointing to the death of his predecessor, Hugo Chávez, as a low point, President Maduro concluded by emphasising that the Revolution would continue nonetheless, saying: “The enemies of Hugo Chávez were wrong, the great revolution did not vanish [when Hugo Chávez passed away].”



Crowds cheer Maduro at a rally to remember Hugo Chávez

Government Protects Minimum Wage and Pensions

Venezuelan workers earning the minimum wage saw an increase in their monthly pay from January 2014, in order to protect their living standards from inflation.

During a meeting with congressional leaders President Nicolás Maduro announced an immediate raise of 10%. The result is a boost in the national

minimum wage from 2,973 bolivars (\$472) to 3,270 bolivars (\$519).

It is being accompanied by a parallel boost for the 2.7 million people currently receiving Social Security as the government takes action to protect the majority against more difficult economic conditions.

Poverty and Unemployment Fall in 2013

Social policies helped reduce Venezuela’s rate of extreme household poverty during 2013 by nearly one percentage point, President Maduro has announced, saying that 2013 saw a continued “downward trend in [the rate of household] poverty in

Venezuela... despite the economic war.” The president also announced that the unemployment rate at the close of 2013 stood at a lower rate of 5.6%, adding that the government will continue to work to achieve the goal of zero poverty by 2019.



Supporters celebrate the Left’s victory in December’s elections

When London Welcomed Chávez

In 2006, President Hugo Chávez visited London as a guest of Mayor Ken Livingstone. During his visit he addressed the TUC, a packed meeting of MPs in Parliament and a huge public rally. To mark the first anniversary of the death of Hugo Chávez, we print below some key quotes from his rally speech outlining his views on how to create a better world.



On the need to change the world:

What we are going to do is change the direction the world is going in. We will take the rest of our lives and dedicate them to that. At the moment there is a destructive model which rules the world: destructive capitalism. This is a real threat, even to the survival of the human race. Yet, when you look at the thousands and thousands of men and women who are looking at alternatives ... you are more convinced that we can change the direction the world is going in.

On the beginnings of the Venezuelan revolution:

There was a revolution in Venezuela... people exploded against the neo-liberal policies of the IMF and the World Bank. That was February 1989. The Berlin Wall fell and the Soviet Union had disintegrated, but in Latin America, and particularly in Caracas, a revolutionary state started. We were looking for other ways forward...

On why Latin America rose against neo-liberalism

It is not just Venezuela, or something you can isolate in one given country. Venezuela, for various reasons... is the first place the volcano exploded. It has fallen to us to be a kind of vanguard... now we are now becoming a whole mass. Look at what is happening in Latin

America and the Caribbean. In the year 2000 there was a whole chorus singing in unison the neo-liberal song.

There was not one head of state who said something different, or anything out of line with the Washington Consensus, the IMF, the World Bank. ... Latin America was given an overdose of this doctrine. These were shock policies; the idea of a free market that would sort out everything. This invisible hand in fact destroys everything.

On socialism of the 21st Century:

We call it socialism in the 21st century in Venezuela... Socialism, first and foremost, has to be about humanism. You have to love people and love humanity... respect others, and recognise we are all equal and no one is better than anyone else -- be they man, woman, a young child, be they white, black, Muslim, Christian, atheist... A lot of people don't believe that and this is a kind of poison we absorb....

On women's equality:

In this world, there are half and half: men and women. I say, we are equal: men and women. One of the intrinsic features of capitalism is that it excludes or exploits women. Capitalism is very macho. Socialism can't be... This is a political issue: the involvement of women in political struggles, in social struggles to save humanity.

On participative democracy:

For us Venezuelans, political socialism is ...what we call revolutionary democracy. ...If democracy is not representative, nothing can be solved. We have to talk about a democracy in which we are all participants. Power to the people and for the people.

On changing the economy

Economic socialism is the other front in this battle, to transform the means of production, the economic model. An economy based on different relations of production, work that frees human beings, that includes everybody, doesn't exclude anyone. An economy that serves everybody through an equal distribution of national income - not just concentrated in a few hands.





Free healthcare and education:

Today, for the first time in our history, we have a national public health system. This is with great support from Cuba, [through] about 20,000 Cuban doctors...treating millions of people who didn't have access to health care, free of charge, before. ... We have saved thousands of lives... Last year UNESCO officially said that we are free of illiteracy. Venezuela is a huge school, about 70 per cent of the population are studying!

An alternative to neo-liberalism:

We're building decent housing for people...so that people who never had anywhere decent to live in the past can have a house. We have a distribution system that guarantees food for people and 15 million people are using these popular markets, where food is 40 per cent below what it would be in the free market....so that people can get enough for their basic diet...good healthy food. In both the social and economic, the revolution is making headway.... This scares those who have tried to convince

everyone that there was only one way to do things - neo-liberalism.

Our struggle for peace and justice

[The] elite that governs the United States of North America. ... is a genocidal elite; corrupt, immoral and it knows no limits. ... How many other innocent children will have died today in Iraq? How many more have to die? ... [People] have a right to live in a better world, where there is no war, where equality, justice and peace reign.



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viva venezuela!

National Conference to Celebrate Hugo Chávez's Legacy and Venezuela's Transformation

On Saturday May 10 from 9.30 am – 5.00pm, VSC will host a Conference at the University of London Union entitled *Celebrating Hugo Chávez's Legacy and the Ongoing Transformation of Venezuela*.

Guest Speakers from the Venezuelan government and civil society will participate alongside a range of high profile speakers from Britain including Jeremy Corbyn MP, NUT General Secretary Christine Blower, Chris Williamson MP, Aaron Kiely, NUS Black Students' Officer, writer

Hugo O'Shaughnessy, CWU General Secretary Billy Hayes, Cuban Ambassador H.E Esther Amenteros and H.E. Alicia Castro, the Ambassador for Argentina to Britain (and formerly to Venezuela.)

■ To register send a cheque (£10 waged/organisation delegate or £7 unwaged), made payable to 'Venezuela Solidarity Campaign' to VSC c/o Unite the Union, 33-37 Moreland Street, London, EC1V 8BB, marked National Conference and sending your postal address, email and telephone.

Join the VSC

■ If you join VSC online at: www.venezuelasolidarity.co.uk for only £18 you receive a free DVD of Oliver Stone's *South of the Border*. You can also join by cheque for £18 (£9 unwaged) to *Venezuela Solidarity Campaign*, c/o Unite, 33-37 Moreland Street, London EC1V 8BB



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